

VZCZCXRO6435
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHNR #0799/01 0540953
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 230953Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9786
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000799

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2026
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SUBJECT: KIUNGA: A BORDER TOWN WITHOUT A BORDER

REF: 05 NAIROBI 4764

Classified By: Political Counselor Michael J. Fitzpatrick, reasons 1.4
(b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The impoverished hamlet of Kiunga is where Kenya ends -- and Somalia and the Indian Ocean begin. Security, especially cross-border banditry by Somalis, is the prime concern of local officials. USG-provided assistance is designed to enhance security, border controls and maritime patrols. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Poloff accompanied CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs (CA) team to Kiunga January 26 to meet with local officials and engage in conversations about border security, development needs and coastal politics. Kiunga is a small, extremely poor border town in north Lamu District, Coast Province. It lies 14 kilometers south of the Somali border and is one of only three official border towns along the approximately 900 kilometer Kenya-Somalia border. A sleepy town with little to no contact with the rest of the country, Kiunga is also a major marine conservation area and home to the Kiunga Marine National Reserve.

Security is Top Priority

¶3. (C) The District Officer (DO), head of the Administration Police (AP) and Kenya Police Officer in Command of Station (OCS) each separately told poloff that security is their top concern for Kiunga. Historically, Kiunga's major security concern has been Somali banditry, particularly after the Siad Barre regime fell in 1991. Between the 1960,s and mid 1990,s, the majority of the population fled the area. However, the GOK has made strides since 2000 to improve security in the area, particularly through deploying police and KDOD forces, and some of the population has begun to return to Kiunga. The DO said there are currently 5020 residents in greater Kiunga, with 2000 residing in the town itself.

¶4. (C) The OCS office has made concerted efforts to establish contacts with villages on the Somali side of the border in efforts to foster peace. He said his office was trying to help the people of Raas Kamboni, Somalia, improve their economic welfare in order to curb cross-border banditry. (NOTE: A variety of sources, including open media, have reported on the existence of Al-Itihaad Al-Islamia militant training camps in the Raas Kamboni area, particularly in the years immediately following the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. END NOTE). After assuring Poloff that security has improved in the area and that his officers have strong ties with their Somali neighbors, he then cautioned that Somalis are all &hypocrites8, offering no further explanation. Clearly, suspicions and hostilities remain.

15. (C) The Kenya Police,s capability to counter any actual threat is, at best, limited. The OCS has one HF radio, which works some of the time. He communicates with the district police chief in Lamu via hand-written letters. Although he admits that people can easily &stray8 and &disappear8 within the 14 kilometers separating the actual border from the Kiunga entry point, he claims to have officers patrolling the land route. The head of the AP in Kiunga, who has 14 officers under his command, openly admits there is no real security at the border. He relies on informants to learn of illegal border crossings, but has no phones or vehicles at his disposal to react. (NOTE: There is no cell phone reception in Kiunga. END NOTE). The OCS said the waters are where the true risk lies. The Navy radar station in Kiunga cannot detect wooden boats, which he says are the sources of any contraband or illegal activities. Even if it could detect them, however, there are no Navy boats stationed at Kiunga.

Border Security: A True Oxymoron

16. (C) Poloff and the CA Team, accompanied by at least 10 Kenyan Army soldiers, traveled to the actual border point. At the edge of Kiunga Town, there is an immigration office and a broken gate, which opens to 14 kilometers of &no man,s land8. There are two villages along the way to the border, one completely abandoned, and one housing at most a few dozen residents. The actual border is demarcated by a medium-sized rock in the road, which veers off towards the beach. There was no security presence or facility anywhere past the Kiunga

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gate. The Kenyan soldiers were visibly nervous, and one told Poloff he did not feel comfortable in the area because of Somali bandits.

17. (C) The Kiunga border is similar to Liboi, one of the other three official border crossings between Kenya and Somalia, located in Garissa District, Northeastern Province. Pol Counselor and Poloff visited Liboi in June 2005. Like Kiunga, that border is at least a 20 minute drive from town, where the immigration and customs office is actually located. There are no signs demarcating the border at either Liboi or Kiunga. In fact, the area councilor who accompanied us in Liboi pulled a bumpy log out from under a thorny bush and stated that was the border marking. There was no police presence at the border, but the ground was scattered with bullet casings. On our drive back to Liboi town, several taxis and matatus -- public transportation vans that legally carry 12 passengers -- packed with people and luggage drove past us, heading directly for the border. The immigration officer in Liboi told us less than five people register with his office a day. He admitted that people can easily cross illegally elsewhere along the border and said that as many as hundreds could be doing so without his knowledge.

U.S. Coastal Security Initiative Progressing

18. (C) The visit to Kiunga reinforced the dire need for coastal security assistance (reftel). The Anti Terrorism Assistance (ATA) Office is moving forward with their coastal security initiative to provide boats and training to enhance capacity for joint coastal patrols. A Memorandum of Intent (MOI) is being reviewed by the GOK. Upon signature, ATA will begin a comprehensive program with the Kenya Police Service, Administration Police, Kenya Wildlife Service and Kenya Navy to address this need. Poloff and ATA officials met with the Lamu District Commissioner and key members of his security council on February 13 to discuss the program. All the relevant organizations are on board with the program and view

it as addressing a critical need.

¶9. (C) Currently, the Kenya Police only have two patrol boats for the entire Lamu District, one of which is broken and the other barely operational. ATA plans to purchase 4 boats for the police. As mentioned reftel, the OCPD believes it is key to have police presence felt by increasing their visibility on the waters. Even if they do not succeed in adequately patrolling all the waterways, the OCPD believes this presence will act as a deterrent to criminals and possible terrorists.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Being on the ground in Kiunga confirmed the assessments made in reftel, mainly that it is a vital area for coastal and border security assistance. The CA teams have increased their presence in the area and are planning civic action projects in the town. This has helped the USG gain a foothold into this strategic, but largely untouched area by creating goodwill on the ground. With the launch of ATA,s program, Kiunga should benefit from improved law enforcement capabilities, which in turn will improve Kenya,s overall border management and security. END COMMENT.

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